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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DHAKA 001745

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USTR, MARIDETH SANDLER

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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [EFIS](#) [ELAB](#) [ENRG](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [TSPL](#)
KNNP, BG
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT ADVISER ON S&T COOPERATION,
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND OTHER TOPICS

REF: A. DHAKA 951

[1](#)B. DHAKA 156
[1](#)C. DHAKA 1604

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Classified By: CDA a.i. Geeta Pasi for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Dr. Chowdhury Sajjadul Karim, Adviser for the Ministries of Agriculture, Fisheries and Livestock, and Environment and Forest, expressed hope for a broad implementation of the U.S.-Bangladesh Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement, to include nuclear safety, agriculture, avian influenza, and conservation science, during an October 29 meeting with the CDA a.i. The Adviser comes from Bangladesh's nuclear physics research community and has had a long history of contact with the US Embassy. Dr. Karim also discussed the political situation in Bangladesh and pointedly expressed regret regarding the death of Choilesh Ritchil, an indigenous environmental activist from the Madhupur region. (REFTEL A) END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) On October 29, CDA a.i. and ECONOFF (notetaker) met Adviser Karim. Other Government of Bangladesh officials from the Ministries of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, and Environment and Forests were also present. Karim was eager to discuss implementation of the U.S.-Bangladesh Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement (S&T Agreement) (REFTEL B).

General Political Discussion

[1](#)3. (C) Before launching the discussion of S&T issues, Karim acknowledged that the political parties represent the people, and said that the caretaker government needed to hold discussions with the political parties. He noted that the people's expectations are very high) and that no government would be able to meet all of them.

Avian Influenza

[1](#)4. (SBU) Turning to avian influenza, Karim noted he had just

inaugurated a new AI-focused laboratory at the Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute, the national reference laboratory for H5 virus detection, claiming that the government is very practically oriented. (NOTE: Separately, USAID has engaged Karim on the issue of improving AI coordination within the Government of Bangladesh: he has agreed to support a new coordinator position within the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries.)

GSP Concerns for Shrimp Exports

15. (U) The Adviser raised concerns regarding the current GSP review (REFTEL C) and potential impact on Bangladesh,s shrimp exports to the US. The Adviser and attending officials noted that an abrupt shock to the industry would have a devastating impact on families working in the industry. The CDA a.i. explained the GSP review was a thorough process, promising to maintain a dialogue with the GOB on the issue. COMMENT: USG support thus far has been vital in launching the export-oriented shrimp industry in Bangladesh. END COMMENT.

Flood Recovery

16. (U) Responding to a question regarding recovery from the recent floods, the Adviser explained that while the first set of floods were manageable, the second set overwhelmed Bangladesh,s disaster response capacity. He projected a shortfall of 700 thousand tons of rice due to lost crops but noted that a new hybrid crop may be able to generate an additional 800 to 900 thousand tons if the next harvest is fully successful. He expressed concern over international commodity prices for rice and wheat. (NOTE: Post will report SEPTTEL on the food security situation in Bangladesh, including the GOB,s difficulties in procuring food

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commercially.)

Science and Technology Cooperation

17. (C) Recounting the history of the U.S.-Bangladesh S&T Agreement, Adviser Karim stressed his interest in implementation through a broad-based S&T committee. He acknowledged the GOB,s past single focus on nuclear energy as a limiting factor to progress on S&T cooperation. Noting that S&T cooperation has broad potential, Karim expressed interest in US agricultural extension programs and increased agriculture science exchanges. Other areas of interest include avian influenza and environmental science. As a next step, the Adviser proposed a working level meeting with the Secretary for Science and Technology and Embassy

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counterparts.

18. (SBU) The Adviser expressed great appreciation for the current U.S. Department of Energy,s International Radiological Threat Reduction (IRTR) program (DOE, NA-21).

Choilesh Ritchil Case

19. (C) Regarding the case of the tortured and murdered indigenous environmental and community activist Choilesh Ritchil in Madhupur (REFTEL A), Adviser Karim struck a pensive and serious tone, making the unequivocal statement that the killing (at the hands of the GOB military forces) was wrong. He reiterated his government,s commitment to equitable treatment and the pursuit of justice related to the case.

Environmental Issues

¶10. (SBU) The Adviser stressed Bangladesh would be directly impacted by global warming, and could generate as many as 30 million environmental refugees. Adviser Karim requested U.S. support for Bangladesh,s concerns and spoke passionately about the need for timely action on global warming.

¶11. (U) Adviser Karim thanked us for supporting the Nishorgo project which promotes the conservation of Bangladesh,s national forests with sustainable development and resource management planning. He noted that the GOB had recently resolved a longstanding issue regarding retention of a portion of park entrance fees to fund the project. COMMENT: This breakthrough represents a vital step in ensuring the financial sustainability of the Nishorgo project. END COMMENT.

¶12. (U) Adviser Karim said the Ministry of Environment and Forests is establishing a participatory forestation program in Madhupur, to involve the local indigenous people in the protection and management of the forest. This would entail expansion of the community co-management model employed by the USAID supported Nishorgo project. He added that this approach has high level buy-in from the caretaker government which also supports participatory approaches to forest management, to include both indigenous peoples and reputable NGOs. USAID reports that the Chief Advisor directed that the Nishorgo model be applied in Madhupur.

Comment

¶13. (C) Karim comes across as a proactive problem-solver who seeks to have real impact in his portfolio during the Caretaker government. USAID reports that Karim is their most important high-level contact as well the most helpful they have worked with in years. Karim has repeatedly and effectively interceded with the GOB bureaucracy on behalf of USAID projects. He shows extraordinary interest in even routine USG requests for assistance (for example, he has sought a briefing on a request routed through the Embassy by a US scientist seeking permission to do research in the Sundarbans forest.) Post will follow up with Karim,s staff regarding ideas for implementation of the S&T Agreement.

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